

MUSIC: A TOOL OF NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIAN MUSIC)

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ABSTRACT

There are many complex feelings which cannot be expressed through verbal means so people, all over the world, use arts, particularly fine arts, in order to express their individual experiences and creativity.

Music is a one form of this art. The musicians symbolize the intended messages and codify them and allow the spectator or viewer to decode and interpret the hidden messages or meanings. Therefore, music is not only a tool of conveying a wide range of the stories, emotions, feelings, inner world symbolically, didactically or in a hidden mode. This paper aims to focus on various ways through which music remains a tool of non-verbal communication.

KEYWORDS: Music, Sound, Harmony, Rhythm, Non Verbal Communication, Rasa, Raga

INTRODUCTION



“Music is the universal language.”

-Richard Wagner

Communication in art is basically the communication of feelings or emotions, which essentially involves a symbolic transformation of an experienced world. It is an externalization of emotional experiences of human beings and thereby presents their trenchant picture of life, their values, goals or aspiration, rules, belief or customs in short particular culture of a society or community.

Music is another form of fine arts. In the field of communication, music is considered as one of the most universal of all arts because it works as a daily medicine constantly aiding far better communication with others and ourselves.

Music – Its Evolution

Music is one of the greatest forms of communication in the world. Even though we do not understand the language a singer uses, we get the innate pleasure of sounds and their concatenation. If we look around our surroundings, we will find that our every action implies some form of motion and is usually accompanied by some kind of sound. It is believed that music has its roots in the impersonal and unintentional activities. About the evolution of music, H. E. Neal states that,

“No one knows when the first musical note was sung or played. A primitive child may have tried to imitate the song of a bird, or a cave man might have wailed or chanted in anger when a deer escaped his spear.”

The Effects of Music

Although the music really began with the evolution of human ear and the vocal organs, yet it inhered in our mind as an innate rhythm in our bodies from the very beginning so whenever we listen to music, we are moved spontaneously. Music attunes us to a harmonious, rhythmic and universal spirit. Charles Seeger notes that,

“Music is one of the two traditional means of auditory communication among men, the other being speech....music though not a universal language in all senses of the world, including worldwide perspective, than speech.”

Music is one of the most powerful and unique form of communication which can change our ways of feelings, thinking and actions. It also helps in bringing together intellect and feelings and enables our personal expression and emotional development. Music is also an expression and mirror image of certain attitudes of our consciousness.

Functions of Music

When we say that music is a unique form of communication, the question arises how and what it communicates. To answer this it is essential to know what the musical functions of communication are. Music not only functions as emotional expressions, aesthetic satisfaction, and symbolic representations of innermost feelings but also contributes in the continuity and stability of cultures and integrity of human society. In many cultures, for example, in India, music is traditionally regarded as a means of communicating with God and is a medium of establishing contacts between human and the Divine. It has a philosophical significance too. Charles Kingsley (Sermon xvii. Music. Christmas Day. Luke ii.13, 14) points out the functions of music in this way,

“There is something very wonderful about music. Words are wonderful enough; but music is even more wonderful. It speaks not to our thoughts as words do; it speaks through our hearts and spirits, to the very core and root of our souls. Music soothes us, stirs us up, it puts noble feelings in us, it can make us cringe; and it can melt us to tears; and yet we have no idea how. It is a language by itself, just as perfect in its ways as speech, as words, just as divine, just as blessed.”

Music conveys and responds to what is deep inside the human soul. The musician conveys emotions and innermost feelings, which are universal and are experienced by all in one way or the other. Music also helps humans from different cultures or societies to connect with and understand one another.

The above mentioned functions of music show that music is an important means of communication and is an expression of what we perceive or feel. Hence, it seems sensible to think how it helps in communicating the feelings, ideas

and emotions. It is very clear that music affects our feelings deeply and is a great source of joy and shapes the attitudes, and moods of the listeners.

Communicative Aspects of Music- A Performing Art

Music communicates various feelings, ideas and emotions through its communicative elements such as rhythm, harmony, sound, timbre and texture etc. Among all these elements of music, rhythm is the most crucial one.

- **Rhythm**

Music is inherent in us and it is evident from the rhythm of the heart beats. Music is believed to be expressed in time and is inherent in all aspects of nature. It not only beautifies the melody but it also makes imagination melodious in a certain sense of the world. Someone has rightly observed that ‘rhythm is the pulsation of melody, say, of the universe.’ Tagore defines rhythm in this way,

“What is rhythm? It is the movement generated and regulated by harmonious restriction. This is the creative force in the hand of the artist. So language as words remains in unadvanced prose form as they do not give any lasting feeling of reality. The moment they are taken and put into rhythm, they vibrate into radiance.”

- **Harmony**

The second element of music is harmony that involves the notes harmonious to each other, i.e. notations in same scale, which make a complex but beautiful textures in music. So harmony is a form of innovation and experimentation, which heightens the meaning and beauty of music. Many musicians and singers find harmony to be the ultimate basis of all music.

- **Sound**

Harmony is accompanied by timbre and texture which are the characteristic qualities of sound and sound combinations. Sound, an important element of music, is a measure to qualify a good music. It must have a pleasing melody, harmony, texture and good rhythm. The combination of these elements helps in communicating the intended emotions in listeners. Therefore, true music becomes the voice of our emotions and feelings in such a way that we are transported into a world of joy and beauty and also enables us to look at the reality in a new manner. So music becomes the manifestation of our spirit and soothes our mind and heal our heart. William Congreve opines that,

“Music hath charms to sooth the savage breast,

To soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak,

I have read that things inanimate moved,

And as with living souls have been informed,

By magic numbers and persuasive sound.” (The Mourning Bridge, I.i)

Music – the Language of God

Tolstoy has rightly said ‘Music is the shorthand of emotions’ which, in Indian classical treatises, is associated with the theory of Rasa. It is believed that music is rooted in the Vedas and God Himself is the musical sound pervading the whole universe. Many ancient scholars regard music as the language of God, which was passed down through the saints to help mankind and to purify their minds and souls. Thus, music became the medium between the spiritual and sensual life as well as an integral part of human life. It pervades in our lives from small to big events such as child birth to death, in religious rites and seasonal festivals, etc.

How Does Music Invoke Rasa?

Bharata Muni associates music with the aesthetic sense and explains its role in invoking rasa. He gives examples of Ganghar and Nishada forms, which express the pathetic sense, i.e. karuna rasa, whereas other musical forms like shadja and rishabha forms help in invoking the heroic and marvelous sense, i.e. veera and adbhuta rasa; Shrungara and hasya rasa (erotic and comic sense) have their expressions in Madhyama and Panchama musical forms, whereas vebhatsya rasa (odious rasa) is invoked through musical mode like dhaivata. Tagore recognized the role and importance of music in human lives expressed his notion as,

“Our songs speak of the early dawn and the embroidered starry midnight sky of India. Our song is the world sundered separation pain of dripping rain and the world less ecstasy of the deep madness of the early spring, as it reaches the utmost limits of the forests.....”

Ragas in Indian Music – An Important Means of Communication

Music communicates through various means. Among them, Indian ragas are one of the most important means which help in bringing about the experience of rasa. Matanga Rishi in the Brihaddeshi describes ragas as,

“That which is a special dhvani, is bedecked with swara (notes) and Varna and is colorful or delightful to the minds of the people, is said to be a raga.”

The rhythm in our body is normally associated with the rhythm of the universe, and it is believed that there is a psychological association with the time that goes with the mood of the raga. So ragas are distributed in time during the twenty four hours of the day and there are different ragas for morning, afternoon, early evening, late evening, etc., For instance, Raga Bhairvi, which is popular morning raga, conveys the rasa of peace, devotion, joy, compassion, love, etc., whereas Purvi, the evening raga, is sung in the lamentation of nature for the parting day. Lalita raga which is sung at day break invokes the emotions like love or sorrow of separation. In this way one raga communicates many emotions at one time and therefore, each raga is associated with the specific types of moods or emotions.

It is normally believed that music has some magical and musical powers, which can move or affect deeply even nature too. So ragas, having musical powers in themselves, are also associated with particular seasons. For example, Raga shri is performed during the harvest season, whereas Panchma raga is indicative of the smell of spring in the air and Vasant raga is sung in spring time, which indicates human reactions of the joy of life. Megh raga which is a raga from Mallar family is performed during the rainy season, and it is believed that singing it invites the rain. A famous incident related to it goes like this, “Once the court musicians of Akbar, a famous emperor of India, became jealous of Tansen's (the court musician) eminence and friendship with the Emperor. To destroy him, they played a ruse and suggested to Akbar that he must command Tansen to sing raga Deepak (Melody of Lights), knowing full well that it would burn him up. Not aware of such consequences, the Emperor requested the great singer to sing to him Raga Deepak. The royal command could not be

disobeyed; and so Tansen began to sing the raga. One by one the lamps in the palace courtyard, where he was performing began to light up by themselves. As the music proceeded, the heat started to consume his body. The stupefied king did not know of a way of stopping this slow but sure death. Then someone thought of Tansen's lady who herself was a great musician. She was immediately informed of the tragic situation. On hearing of the danger to her lover, she began to sing raga Malhar and surely the rains came, drenching Tansen and saving his life."

This incident reveals that music has the power not only to communicate the innermost feelings but also to connect the body and mind with the environment and nature. Thus, music has the power to 'name the unnamable and communicate the unknowable.'

CONCLUSIONS

Music is one of the most powerful and unique forms of communication. It includes the characteristic features or elements of music, which work as communicative aspects of music. These elements are rhythm, melody, harmony, sound, timbre and texture, etc. and the combination of these elements help in communicating the intended emotions or feelings. Therefore, music is not only the medium between the spiritual and sensual life, but also an integral part of human life pervading from small to big events. Thus, music has the power to 'name the unnamable and communicate the unknowable.'

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